



## MEETING REPORT

Wednesday, October 16, 2002

### Town Hall Meeting

October 16, 2002, Presentation: Opportunities for Transit-Oriented Development in the Inner Katy Area

*6:00 - 8:00 p.m.*

*Auditorium, Hogg Middle School (1100 Merrill Street)*

The final town hall meeting for the Inner Katy Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Study began at approximately 6:00 p.m. with a reception and open house. The open house consisted of a series of display boards containing information and maps about the study area and the high-capacity transit alignments evaluated. Consultant and City staff were available for members of the public to ask questions and discuss the study outcome and findings. The boards covered the following areas:

- Acknowledgement of the participants in the study process, including the Steering Committee, public agencies, and the consultant team;
- Instructions on offering comments via one-on-one communication with staff, written comments placed in a comment box, the project website, or e-communication with Council Member Gabriel Vasquez;
- Purpose of the town hall meeting;
- Definition and elements of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD);
- Benefits of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD);
- What makes Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) successful;
- Purpose of the Inner Katy TOD Study;
- Maps of the study area including special districts, existing land use, the original five alternative alignments, and final Alignments “B” and “C”;
- Transit modes considered, including light rail, commuter rail, heavy rail, and bus rapid transit;
- Criteria used to screen the alternative alignments; and,
- Next steps beyond this study.

### Opening Comments and Introductory Remarks

Patricia Rincon-Kallman, Assistant Director of the City of Houston Planning & Development, opened the meeting with comments about the inception of the study, participants in the process including H-GAC, METRO, members of the Steering Committee representing various organizations and associations in the Inner Katy area, and members of the Consultant Team. Ms. Rincon-Kallman expressed her appreciation to all participants who were involved in producing a thorough assessment of the economic development benefits derived from various TOD alignments through the 12 square mile study area. Ms. Rincon-Kallman introduced District H Council Member Gabriel Vasquez as well as members of the Consulting Team led by Wilbur Smith Associates.



Council Member Vasquez spoke regarding the overall purpose for this study citing transportation as a major issue confronting the area. Inner Katy is affected by numerous major roadways (I.H. 45, I-H. 10, Loop 610, Hardy Tollway and its extension, etc), making transportation vital to the sustainability of District H. Council Member Vasquez emphasized that this study is an initial step in a long process of determining the actual route for High Capacity Transit (HCT) through the area, but it is an important first step toward identifying sensitive issues and the economic benefits that may be derived from such an investment. He also, thanked all participants for their effort in this study.

Bret Keast, AICP, of the lead firm Wilbur Smith Associates introduced each member of the consultant team and their individual roles in the project. He explained the step-by-step process in the development of the study outcome beginning with the existing conditions and characteristics of the Inner Katy area. He explained the process of evaluating and screening the five alignments down to the two preferred alignments. The development scenarios were described including the preferred outcomes, which were determinants in the feasibility assessment. Mr. Keast noted that while Alignment “B” was the more feasible showing more economic benefit, alignment “C” has positive aspects as well that will need to be more closely evaluated in subsequent stages of study. Bret indicated that Chapter 7 – Implementation is in the initial stages of development and will be available on the project website upon completion within the next few weeks.

Gary Mitchell, AICP, of Wilbur Smith Associates spoke about the various issues and challenges the consultant team, City, and Steering Committee faced during the study process. Some of the issues included:

- The difference between a transit study and an economic development study and which type the Inner Katy TOD study represented. This study was both a transit and economic feasibility study evaluating both the alignment and mode of high capacity transit and the economic feasibility of the alignments. The outcome of the study points to the alignment that will create the most economic development benefit.
- The degree of feasibility between the two alignments. While Alignment “B” was selected as the preferred alternative – resulting from the economic development opportunities identified along this route - this does not mean Alignment “C” does not contribute viable benefits as well. Both of these alignments and others will be subjected to more detailed environmental and transit feasibility studies to be conducted by METRO in the coming months. The Inner Katy TOD study findings and conclusions will be used as input to these studies.
- Whether the purpose of high capacity transit in the corridor will be commuter-oriented, passing riders from the Outer Katy area through the study area to downtown, or whether it will provide access and service to Inner Katy residents. While all options will be further evaluated as part of METRO’s detailed studies, for the purposes of this study the two alignments assumed up to eight transit



stops within the study area. The actual number and locations of stops will be determined by METRO at the appropriate stage in the planning process.

- The desire to protect and preserve the assets of the area, including its historic districts and special character areas, its neighborhoods and the open space areas and bayous. Each was identified in the Inner Katy study and will be taken into consideration in subsequent stages of study.
- Density is necessary for successful transit-oriented development, but residents do not necessarily desire high-density development in proximity to their neighborhoods. It was noted that while various type, scales and densities of development are shown in the preferred development scenarios, there are various factors that will contribute to the final development decisions including economic viability of these parcels and sub-areas as well as significant other considerations such as the value of the historic districts and other special features in the area, e.g. Washington-on-Westcott Roundabout.

This study is a visionary, conceptual view of what could happen when high-capacity transit is introduced to the Inner Katy corridor, based upon the experiences of other similar areas and corridors across the U.S. There will be a substantial amount of discussion and further study before any decisions are made. Involvement in the effort is essential to ensure input into the decision-making process.

#### **Presentation on Opportunities for TOD in Inner Katy**

A digital presentation was shown and narrated by Gary Mitchell, AICP. The presentation highlighted the study purpose and its elements, notable existing conditions in the Inner Katy study area, the process of evaluating the five alternative alignments to determine the two most viable route options, key findings of the baseline condition analysis, development and redevelopment opportunities and the preferred scenarios, physical design possibilities, the considerations in the selection of HCT mode, and implementation tools including TOD strategies and financing options. A second digital presentation was conducted by John Fregonese of Fregonese Calthorpe Associates (FCA), which was a “3D” computer animated example of what the density and scale of development in the Inner Katy area could look like with the implementation of transit-oriented development. The visualization showed increased density in proximity to a transit station with lesser scale development adjacent to existing neighborhoods.

#### **Next Steps Beyond the Inner Katy TOD Study**

Barbara Ogilvie, Director of Capital and Environmental Planning for METRO spoke about the next steps in the process to determine the mode and alignment for high capacity transit in the Inner Katy area. Ms. Ogilvie indicated that there are studies currently underway by METRO that will utilize the findings and outcomes of the Inner Katy TOD study as inputs to their process. She emphasized the importance of citizen input to their planning process and commended this study for its efforts to document the values and options of residents and other area



interests. The findings and outcomes of this study will be used by METRO in preparing the METRO Mobility Transit System Plan.

Ms. Ogilvie indicated that METRO is currently conducting several corridor planning studies in other portions of their service area, which will conclude in the spring of 2003. A draft of the Transit System Plan will go to the METRO Board and the community for comments in April 2003. A final Transit System Plan will go to the Board again in the summer of 2003 and will possibly be adopted in July 2003. With a system plan in place, METRO will come back to the community to work on details of the next steps for Inner Katy. This could be a formal Alternatives Analysis, or not. Detailed feasibility and environmental studies would also be required prior to any final funding or construction decisions.

At Council Member Vasquez's request, Ms. Ogilvie described the three types of corridor studies. An Alternatives Analysis (AA) is a federally funded study that looks into an area in great detail. In contrast, corridor planning studies look at areas in less detail. The TOD Study looked at a lower level of detail than a corridor planning study. The products of the TOD Study will be carried forward by METRO, who may eventually conduct an AA in the corridor. AAs typically take between 12 and 18 months.

#### **Questions and Answers**

**Question:** Were fatal flaws identified with Alignment C?

**Response:** No fatal flaws were identified for either Alignments B or C, based upon a cursory review and evaluation of a consultant to METRO. METRO will carry forward both alignments from the Inner Katy study for its future analysis.

**Question:** Who funded this study?

**Response:** The study was a partnership and was partially funded by the City of Houston, the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC), and METRO.

**Question:** Will the Washington-on-Westcott Roundabout Initiative be a consideration in the planning for Alignment "C"?

**Response:** METRO will exercise all options to minimize conflict with the roundabout. Several options available are such as a cut-and-cover (partially operated below grade) or avoiding the immediate area with the final route. However, these options have not yet been analyzed. A plan for Inner Katy will be adopted as part of the Transit System Plan in the Summer of 2003, which will solicit input of local interests.

**Question:** Will relay stations be built or shuttle buses used in conjunction with the high-capacity transit line?

**Response:** A complete system will be designed and operated to provide maximum access to all riders, including everything from pedestrian access routes to a feeder system of buses. METRO's demand response system will also continue to operate to serve the needs of persons with disabilities.



**Question:** Does this study show that the economic development would be so great that an alignment along IH-10 would not be considered?

**Response:** No. This study evaluated two alignment options, neither of which included the freeway. METRO will be looking at these two options as well as others including operating adjacent to I.H. 10. Ridership is another important factor so, if placing high capacity transit along I.H. 10 results in sufficient ridership to make it feasible, it will certainly be considered.

**Question:** Will development in the area be left solely to the developer to determine the level of density?

**Response:** The density would likely occur mainly along the alignment itself and at the final transit station locations. Care was taken in this study to document the concerns for the integrity of existing neighborhoods and value of special districts and features. The study identified up to eight potential station locations based on community input, but the station sites and conceptual at this stage and will likely change. The size of stations and the density around them will largely depend on demand. If a transit line were to be along I.H. 10 for example, transit centers would likely be more like park and ride lots rather than true transit-oriented development. Neighborhood transit centers, however, would be quite different.

**Question:** How would METRO acquire right of way (ROW) for high capacity transit in this area?

**Response:** METRO would identify as much public ROW as possible in the area to avoid acquiring private property and then would work closely with property owners for obtaining additional ROW, as necessary. Approximately 50 feet of ROW is needed for bi-directional high-capacity transit operations.

Closing

The Town Hall meeting was adjourned at 8:05 PM.